WITH DR. SVEN HEDIN ON GERMAN FIGHTING LINE IN FRANCE

The Great War Machine in Action Described by the Well Known Swedish Explorer, Who Visited the Trenches as the Kaiser's Personal Guest

In the Headquarters of the Crown Prince---Terrific Destruction Wrought by the Big Guns---Depressing Scenes in the Field Hospitals Vividly Pictured

PERHAPS the most complete picture yet presented of the German war machine in action is given by Dr. Sven Hedin, the Swedish explorer, in his book "With the German Armies in the West," of which an English translation by H. G. de Walterstorff is being brought out by the John Lane Company of New York and London. The book is not intended to be a narrative of military operations. It is a record of the author's observations and impressions. The figures in the procession passing through its pages range from the Kaiser, the Crown Prince and German generals down to French captives and unhappy inhabitants of the occupied territories.

Dr. Hedin went to the front by special permission of the German Emperor and every facility was given him to visit the war theatres of France and Belgium. His book, therefore, is in the nature of an account by a semi-official eyewitness of the German army in the field. As is well known, he takes the German view. He finds nothing to condemn in Germany's conduct of the war. But whatever may be thought of his opinions, he records interesting facts. In a "publisher's note" John Lane says:

"As I have been publicly criticised for undertaking the issue of the English edition of this book, for the most part by people who have not read it, I am taking the somewhat unusual course of giving a brief explanation of my point of view. In the first place Dr. Sven Hedin's book is essentially a record of facts as he saw them. He is a trained observer, and there can be no question of his veracity. . . . Again, is it not well to let the English nation know, for instance, that those 600,000 troops which our gallant 120,000 successfully withstood at Ypres were not ill clad, ill fed levies, but magnificently equipped troops with a machinelike organization behind them?"

Dr. Hedin started on his trip in September and returned in November. The military authorities in Berlin supplied him with an automobile and Capt. von Krum accompanied him as travelling companion, chauffeur and guide. "My Rittmeister," writes Dr. Hedin, "had retired from active service, but on the outbreak of war he had rallied to the colors and placed his car at the disposal of the crown in accordance with the mobilization decree. He drives it himself in the service of the army, and the orderly who is to accompany us is in peace time his own chauffeur.

"I was told that the Volunteer Automobile Corps now mustered 350 cars. The owner of a car reports himself and is paid for his vehicle, and he may at the end of the war buy back his car from the crown. It is reckoned that the serviceable life of a car is five years. If the owner paid 10,000 marks for his car and has used it for four years he only gets paid at the last year's valuation, i. e., 2,000 marks, while if the car is quite new he receives the full amount.

"Three hundred and fifty cars—it doesn't sound much, but these cars merely form the Volunteer Corps, and I suppose you will feel more at ease when I tell you that at the western front alone there are altogether 50,000 cars in use, while 40,000 are left in Germany. That means 50,000 chauffeurs. When one considers that each car usually has a crew of two it will be seen that the equivalent of over two army corps are attached to the automobile service. There are plenty of men in Germany, plenty for every purpose."

They started on September 15. At Luxemburg he was invited to dine with the Kaiser, of whom he says:

"Any feeling of timidity one may have had while waiting for the most powerful and most remarkable man in the world vanished completely once the Emperor, after a more than hearty handshake and a cheery welcome, began to speak. His voice is manly and military, he speaks extraordinarily plainly without slurring over a single syllable, he is never at a loss for a word, but always strikes the nail on the head—often in exceedingly forceful terms.

"He punctuates his sentences with quick and expressive gestures. His speech flows smoothly, is always terse and interesting and is often suddenly interrupted by questions delivered with lightning precision, which one must endeavor to answer equally quickly and clearly. A good answer never fails to elicit the Emperor's approval. He is excedingly impulsive and his conversation is a mixture of earnest and jest. A ready repartee or an amusing tale causes him to laugh so heartily that his shoulders shake with it.

At Stenay, in France, the headquarters of the Fifth army, Dr. Hedin met the Crown Prince, with whom he had supper. He writes:

"Would you like to know what the German Crown Prince, the Crown Prince of Prussia, eats for supper? Here is the menu: Cabbage soup, boiled beef with horseradish and potatoes, wild duck with salad, fruit, wine, and coffee with cigars. And what would you say the conversation was about? It is hard to say exactly, but we travelled over almost the whole world with the ease bred by familiarity.

"The Crown Prince, like the Emperor, began with Tibet, and from there it was but a step across the Himalayas to the palms of the Hugli Delta, the pagodas of Benares, the silver moonlight over Taj Mahal, the tigers of the jungle and the music of the crystal waves of India beating against the rocks of Malabar point. We also spoke of old unforgettable memories and of common friends who now love us no longer—of the brave and famous Kitchener, the conqueror of Omdurman and South Africa, of the Mararajahs and their fairylike splendor at Bikanir, Kutch Behar, Gwalior, Kashmir and Idar.

"We also talked about the war and its horrors, and the terrible sacrifices it demands. 'But it cannot be helped,' said the Crown Prince, 'our fatherland asks us to give all we have, and we will, we must win, even if the whole world takes up arms against us.'

"'Is not the calm here wonderful? We seem to be living to-night in the most absolute peace, and yet it is but a couple of hours drive to the firing line,' observes my imperial host after listening to a short, concise and satisfactory report made in a ringing voice by an officer who has just entered.

"'Yes, your Imperial Highness. I had imagined the staff headquarters of an army to resemble a buzzing beehive, but now that I have the reality before me I find no trace of anxiety or nervousness, nothing but calm and assurance everywhere. But what I should like to see most of all would be a battle, for I suspect that in common with most other civilians I have formed an erroneous opinion on this subject.'

"The Crown Prince smiles and answers: 'Yes, battle painters like Neuville and Detaille would have little use for their art in these days. Of the fighting men one sees practically nothing, for they are concealed by the ground and in the trenches, and it is rather dangerous to get too close to a bayonet charge—unless one's duty takes one there. Generally speaking, the distance between the fighting forces increases with the improvement in firearms. Those who have the best artillery have the best prospects of winning.

"'To us the field gray uniform is a great advantage, as we merge into the coloring of the ground, while the brilliant uniforms of the French are visible from afar. To see a battle is practically impossible—not even the commander directing it sees much of it, his direction is effected by telephone and is dependent on information and reports received, which in turn are carefully sifted and weighed.

"'For a spectator to post himself on a height in the neighborhood is not advisable, for then he may be sure of being taken for an observer directing the artillery fire and becomes at once the target of the enemy's shells. You shall, however, during your visit here be allowed to witness all that it is possible to see.'

"What life and spirit at the Crown Prince's headquarters! Everything was gay with the freshness of youth and devoid of restraint. No trace of the stiffness of court ceremonial. Even Gen. Schmidt, who usually maintained the strictest discipline, was infected by the prevailing spirit of camaraderie. But owing to the terrible burden of work which rested on the shoulders of the Chief of Staff it was not unusual for him to come in for his meals after the others."

Later near Eclisfontaine he had an opportunity of seeing what the fighting was like:

"The booming of cannon is now audible all round us, even from behind a battery of four 21 centimeter mortars having been brought up from the village and unlimbered only a hundred meters away from us. They make a terrible noise and the whole ground trembles when they are discharged. I had a peculiar feeling when standing in front of these winged messengers of death, a consciousness of security mingled with respect, for are they not fighting against the enemy's positions, the duty of whose guns is to take our lives?

"The four reports come so close together that there is only a second or two in between. Then, for half a minute or longer, one hears a whining, singing, hissing whistle overhead and one looks up involuntarily. The projectile is, however, only discernible if one stands right behind the mortar as nearly as possible in the extension of the line of fire.

"The four shells accompany one another through the air and sing the same whining song in the same high pitch. The sound arises through the air rushing to fill the vacuum behind the advancing body and through the friction. Sometimes it seems to die away, but is heard again presently quite plainly, this being no doubt due to air currents.

"Time after time the four 'growlers' emptied their heavy shells over the French positions opposite and each one was meant to cause the death of heaven knows how many human beings. Their main task was to drive the defenders out of Varennes, which is situated six kilometers south-southwest of Eclisfontaine.

"After the artillery had been pounding away all day I asked an officer what the cost had been. He made a rapid calculation for thirty-two batteries of different types and estimated the average cost of each round at fifty marks and the number of rounds at 12,000, which would make an expense of 600,000 marks for a single day, and yet this was only for a short portion of the long German western front.

"Others, however, considered the estimate too high, both as regards average cost and number of shots fired. In any case the artillery swallows up incredible sums in a war such as this, in which it plays a greater and more powerful part than ever before."

It was soon after this that he witnessed an examination of French prisoners:

"One group of disarmed Frenchmen comprised a Captain. He had received a bullet through the thigh, limped badly and was supported by two soldiers. He had a frank and noble face and one could tell that he was a thorough gentleman. When his little band was to be examined a chair was brought out for him, for he looked pale and weak.

"'Is your wound causing you much pain, Captain?' a German officer asked.

"'None at all, it is a mere trifle,' he replied.

"'Have you suffered heavy losses during the fighting?'

"'Not particularly; we fill up all gaps.'

"'You look tired and worn, I am sure you must have had a rough time of it lately?'

"'No, not by any means; I have been doing very well.'

"'Does it distress you to be among the prisoners?'

"'Yes,' he answered, in a low voice, without raising his head.

"He was not among those who are demoralized by capture, and he was certain to retain his pride in captivity. When the examination was over he rose, saluted and vanished round the bend of the road together with his men in blue and red."

Dr. Hedin was impressed by the perfection of the German organization in every branch. He found the medical service efficient, but the lot of the wounded was sad enough. Here is a scene in a temporary hospital near the fort:

"The wounded man half opens his eyes. The doctor taps him gently on the shoulder and asks: 'What regiment do you belong to?' He mumbles a few unintelligible words which we take to mean 'Reserve Regiment 87.' The brain centre controlling his organs of speech has been injured. He lapses once more into unconsciousness, his thoughts no longer wander. Shortly they will cease altogether and the soldier will rest, as now beside his comrades, in the little churchyard in the village.

"Of course it was a depressing and melancholy experience to stand beside so many deathbeds. Every day numberless men in the heyday of youth were thus being gathered to the eternal rest, in hospitals and trenches. But one gets accustomed to such sights, as do the soldiers themselves, for it does not seem to depress or frighten them in the least to see their comrades die.

"When a soldier sees his nearest neighbors fall he does not think: Next time it is my turn. On the contrary his train of reflection seems to be like this: Yes, there they are, poor chaps, but I am still on my feet and the gaps will soon be filled. No need to lament over men who are dying for their country and for the liberty and honor of their people.

"Before we left the hospital we had a look at some of the identification disks carried by the German soldiers round the neck, by the French round the wrist. One of the former read: 'Res. I. R. 17. 6. K. No. 220,' and one of the latter: 'Seine, 6, Bau (Bureau) 601.' A third bore the somewhat incomplete inscription: 'Leclerc, Alfred, 1902.'"

To show the character of much of the fighting Dr. Hedin writes:

"In the Argonne forest much blood has flown, as I myself have seen in its northern part, both from the east and west, when with the Fifth and the Fourth army, respectively. Although the whole of the front has developed more or less into a siege war with trenches, communicating trenches, barbed wire entanglements and trous-de-loup, this applies even in a larger measure to this forest region.

"Here the engineer troops have had much work to do, and it is the generals of the engineers who lead the advance. To progress quickly is impossible. The forest, so badly kept that it would horrify a Northern sylviculturist, is very difficult to advance in. In certain places one has to cut one's way step by step through shrub and undergrowth. This sort of country is easy to defend, and the French understand their business well.

"At night or in a fog the Germans push forward a thin line of infantry about fifteen paces distant from one another. After having advanced as far as the conditions allow the men dig themselves in. This gives rise to a chain of pits which afterward, by continued digging longitudinally, are united into a continuous trench. When the men have made themselves at home in this new position and extended it a further area in front of the one occupied is cleared by fire, whereupon the fresh advance is made.

"In this way the forest is swept clean. It must be taken step by step, tree by tree, for—as I have already pointed out—the defenders have organized even the treetops for defence, and have mounted machine guns there. In the gloom of the undergrowth it is not always easy to distinguish friend from foe.

"On the occasion of my visit it was not advisable for any one to come too close to the Argonne forest unless his duties called him there. In certain cases the risk seemed even greater for those behind the firing lines than for those in the advanced positions, for the French usually fired too high. Their shots mostly passed over the heads of their nearest opponents, who, by the way, were remarkably well concealed. This is not to be wondered at, for when the enemy is almost upon one accurate shooting becomes difficult.

"The parts of the forest which have already been taken by the Germans look very strange. The ground is streaked with trenches and communicating trenches joining the former together, and the trees are often charred and stripped by the fire.

"The French are cleverer at artillery than infantry shooting. One of the doctors here told me that of the 2,500 patients he had had to attend to not quite 10 per cent. had been hit by rifle bullets; a few had been wounded by sword cuts or bayonet thrusts, but all the rest had been struck by shell splinters and shrapnel bullets. If the superb armored turrets are useless when opposed by artillery of the calibre of the great German mortars. The circumstance that the projectile does not burst until it has penetrated into or even through the concrete bed gives rise to a havoc which challenges all attempt at description. Everything within the 'bombproof arch' thus struck is rent asunder and destroyed without leaving a trace. The projectile first operates from above downward, and then from below upward through the explosion."

Here are two pictures of the desolation in Belgium:

"Malines lies still and empty, and its streets are lifeless except for the troops and transport trains marching through, and the number of stray dogs, half wild, who are sniffing for their lost masters among the ruins. The main street leading to the cathedral recalls in a horrible manner the ravages of war, the relentless destroyer of peaceful homes. On the left we pass a house the interior of which has been laid completely bare by a shell, reminding one of the geological section of a piece of rock blasted for railway work.

"The ground floor is a pile of wreckage and lumber. From the first floor a tangle of draperies, curtains or mats is dangling down toward the street, like shreds of red flags, and the joists and girders between the first and second floors have collapsed, creating a perfect scrap heap of wrecked furniture. On the second floor, however, a part of a room has been left intact, revealing a cupboard, a child's cot, and, strange to say, a looking glass which still hangs perfectly uninjured on its hook.

"Once more we looked in at a chateau by the roadside. I shall never forget the impressions which thronged into my mind as I wandered through its dim, desolate rooms. In the bedrooms and guest rooms on the first floor the beds were still in the state in which the masters of the house and their guests had left them.

"On the ground floor was the large, lordly looking dining room. The table was laid. A large dish still contained the remnants of the course last served, an omelet. Some ten persons evidently had partaken of the meal. Some plates were empty, others still contained scraps of omelet. Knives and forks lay pell mell among the bits of bread by the side of the covers.

"A couple of empty champagne bottles stood on the table, while a third still contained a few drops of the joyous wine, which had now lost its sparkling freshness. A few serviettes lay crumpled on the table, others on the chairs, and a couple had dropped to the floor. Everything testified to a hasty and panic stricken departure."

Dr. Hedin gives an interesting account of the elaborate system of trenches:

"In the trench wall nearest to the enemy bowl shaped niches or dugouts are excavated in the soil, providing effective protection against overhead bursts and not infrequently against direct hits. But it is not impossible for a shell to pitch in the wall, and in that case even the occupants of the dugouts are doomed. To provide against this the men often dig out a cavern, and these caves are often so elaborate and luxurious that it is thought fit to put up curtains at the entrance.

"Along the walls of these caves straw is laid out for sleeping berths and the little tent section included in each soldier's packing is often used as a blanket. When the distance between the opposing lines of trenches, as in the case I am describing, is only eighty meters no light must be lit even in these subterranean caves, still less a fire, and the air in them is therefore cold, damp and raw. But if the nearest enemy is three or four hundred meters away these rigid rules are sometimes dispensed with. But even then no fire must be lit and no naked light is allowed in the trench proper.

"The trenches do not run in straight lines, unless, as in the country south of Antwerp, the ground is absolutely flat. Usually their length and outline depend on the formation of the ground. As a rule they are situated so as to offer an uninterrupted view of the enemy positions opposite and so as to avoid dead angles. A free field of fire is the most important consideration. A trench thus often receives a very irregular shape, resembling a curve with numerous bends and salients.

"The infantry can only sap ahead and stick to what it has gained. Every position must be treated by attackers as if it were a fortress in itself. Every meter of open country, every tree in the Argonne, must be captured by what might almost be described as a separate engagement. The French are defending themselves with the most brilliant courage, and even Gen. von Winckler characterized them as worthy opponents to the world's finest soldiers.

"In conclusion I should like to say a few words about the intelligence service in the field. The French are past masters in the art of using civilian spies. The wounded in a field hospital are safe as long as they have a couple of Frenchmen among them, but as soon as they have been removed for transport eastward even this sanctuary comes under the enemy's fire.

"How is it that the enemy knows that these particular wounded have been removed? In a village a soldier had made the acquaintance of a woman. One fine day she told him that she was going away. Why? he asked. Because to-morrow this village was going to be bombarded. The soldier did not pay much attention to the prophecy, but the woman was right. How did she know it? Of course because she had been warned by a spy.

"The German regulations governing the liberties of the civil population have naturally to be made much more stringent on account of such incidents, and that is why even officers are sometimes stopped at night when travelling within the fighting zone. But even the most vigilant are sometimes outwitted by the French spies. Complete telephone systems have in several instances been discovered below ground, clearly laid down in anticipation of the French retreat. The main cables no doubt existed already in peace time, but on the outbreak of war an additional system of temporary lines had been added, and during the retreat telephone stations were rigged up in all sorts of unsuspected places.

"Once a peasant came stealing [illegible] from the French side into the German lines, where he was immediately seized. He declared with the most innocent face in the world that he had come to look after his cattle, which unfortunately had been left behind on the German side. Let the poor fellow look after his cows, they thought, and so he was allowed to pass. Of course there could be no question of letting him return to the French lines for he might be a spy sent out to gather information.

"An hour later he was seen driving a little herd of cattle before him, but nobody took any notice. This was a daily occurrence. However, it happened that he drove his beasts right up to a German battery which had been so well masked that the [illegible] had been unable to detect it. When he left the cattle grazing and vanished completely.

"Presently a murderous fire descended upon the battery, which had to be moved in the night to another position. The peasant was in the employ of his countrymen, and his movements had been noted by an aeroplane who had signalled to the French artillery positions.

"It was often palpable that a French fire had been directed with the aid of telephone communication, but where is the underground cable and where is the operator? Usually the chance that leads to the latter's discovery.

"It had been noticed several times that within a certain area the French fire had searched and struck the most susceptible points on the German side with such rapidity and accuracy that the direction of the fire could only be explained by the existence of some very rapid and accurate information. It had also been noticed that [illegible] had haunted this particular [illegible] the conclusion was not far to seek that telephone communication [illegible] could lie at the root of the [illegible] operations of the enemy artillery.

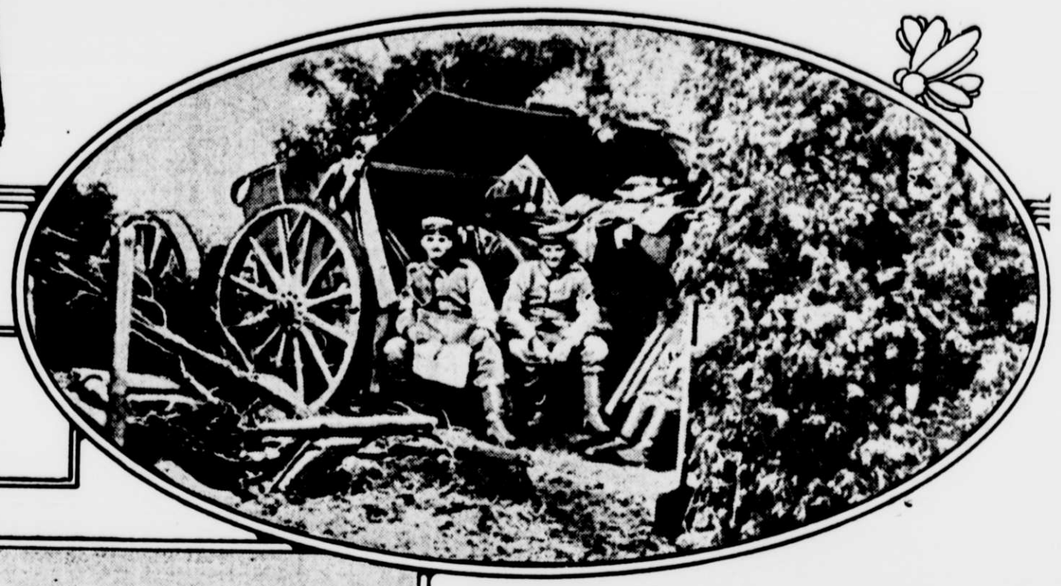
"Any one travelling [illegible] west France in the autumn [illegible] but be struck by the enormous [illegible] stacks dotted here and there [illegible] fields, often reaching a height [illegible] to eight meters, cylindrical [illegible] and capped by a flat roof. The interior of such stacks [illegible] have often discovered [illegible] erators.

"When I drove past one [illegible] stacks for the first time [illegible] had been pulled to pieces [illegible] straw scattered in the [illegible] fusion. I asked my [illegible] the reason of this [illegible] ment' and was told [illegible] thought that [illegible] phone apparatus might [illegible] himself inside and [illegible] make quite sure.

"I have since often [illegible] stacks in the fields and [illegible] it must feel like to [illegible] month after month [illegible] suspicion that by [illegible] nation from the [illegible] the neighborhood [illegible] of vagrant peasants [illegible] doubt steal up to [illegible] of night and [illegible] hostile [illegible] what they have seen

Dr. Sven Hedin.

Destruction wrought by "Fat Bertha" in Fort St. Catherine.



German gunners reading a newspaper during lull in the fighting.

A street in Antwerp after the city's fall.

German officer finding the range with a tripod telescope.